

"DRAGON'S TEETH" OF FREEDOM

Colonel Edwin F. Black, *United States Army*

LAST fall, a high-ranking US military officer quoted the head of one of the developing countries of Asia as saying that civic action projects at the village level were sowing the "‘dragon’s teeth’ of freedom and democracy among his people."

In this statement, the chief of that state again underlined the fact that the payoff of civic action is at the village and hamlet level. It is all well and good to establish ministries of civic action in the capitals, to draw up elaborate paper programs, to ship quantities of supplies from the United States, and to augment military staffs with civic action specialists. But the

real results are achieved only through direct contact with the peasant.

This is nothing new to the dedicated people who are working in this field. Great efforts have been made to carry a government's presence into the rural areas, to reach the small villages and hamlets. The difficulty is, however, that often the civic action effort—prodded strenuously by US advisors—gets off to a successful start and then usually runs far ahead of the local government's ability to exploit an initial favorable contact with continuing long-range rural development programs.

For example, in an effort to reach

as many people as possible with their limited civic action resources, the general practice has been for the central authorities to send out small, mobile teams from village to village to "bring the government to the people." The pattern, in this case, usually begins with the unexpected arrival of one or two jeeploads of officials, both military and civilian, in the center of the town.

Team's Technique

The civic action team leader seeks out the village elder and, with his help, hastily assembles a group of local residents, the majority of whom are usually women and children. The team leader then makes a speech explaining his mission, after which he distributes some clothing, rice, salt, or seed, all accompanied by a liberal handout of government pamphlets and pictures of the chief of state. The team then jumps back into its vehicles and rushes on to the next village.

While well meaning, this technique will never achieve the lasting results desired, or really win the people to the government. It makes little lasting impression on the villager. In fact, it generally confuses him. The peasant is a practical individual. He is not used to such "windfalls from heaven."

Colonel Edwin F. Black, a member of the staff of the Commander in Chief, Pacific, holds a Master of Arts degree from George Washington University and is a graduate of the National War College. He served in Europe with the Office of Strategic Services during World War II; was Military Assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Defense; and served with the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam. He is the author of "The Master Plan for Conquest in Vietnam" which appeared in the June 1963 issue of the MILITARY REVIEW.

He is very likely to be suspicious of this sudden largess from the remote government, and probably wonders what the catch is—what the government will expect from him in return.

Cautiously he listens to the team leader. He wants a credible explanation for this rare government interest in his welfare. Such explanations cannot be hurried and, consequently, require more time than the team's tight schedule generally permits. As a result, the villager seldom understands the team's message. Return visits, while often promised, frequently fail to materialize. The net results of this kind of crash program generally are small.

Basic Problems

The foregoing example, fortunately, is now becoming less frequent than in the past. It does, however, illustrate some of the basic problems encountered by underdeveloped countries as they try to organize their own civic action programs. Summarized, these problems fall into four categories:

- Gaining the villager's confidence, which calls for patience, an intimate knowledge of rural customs, and an ability to communicate.

- Honest, well-trained personnel must be found to run the national civic action effort.

- An existing nationwide organization must be given the job of handling the implementation of the program, particularly in the remote areas.

- The civic action program itself must be tied in to a continuing rural development program with long-term objectives and sustained government support.

An underdeveloped country has only one organization capable of meeting the first three requirements—its

army. The soldiers themselves come from the villages; they understand the peasant's point of view; and they are able to start from a basis of common experience. The army is the principal source of honest, trained personnel. And, of course, the army is the only nationwide organization that operates

others. While Asian countries are cited, the lessons learned are believed to be applicable to any emerging nation whether it is in Latin America, the Middle East, or Africa.

Laos is, perhaps, a good place to start since one of the best analyses of the subject has been written by



US Army

In fighting a guerrilla war, civic action must be in the forefront of all activity. Pictured is an improvised dispensary in South Vietnam.

consistently in the remote areas of the country.

Since the army is organized to defeat Communist insurgency, it is more than ready to help any program which is designed to win the people over to more active support of the fight against the Communists within the country. In fact, civic action is now generally regarded as one of the most important counterinsurgency weapons.

Sufficient data is now available to enable the serious student to benefit from the practical experience of

Brigadier General Oudone Sananikone, the Royal Lao Government's Commissioner General of Civic Action from 1957 to 1959.*

General Sananikone makes a very basic point at the outset of his discussion. He says that, although in most cases counterinsurgency is the primary motivating factor in getting a civic action program started, such a program would be a necessity in

* Brigadier General Oudone Sananikone, "Civic Action in Laos: The Royal Lao Program," *Military Review*, December 1963, pp 44-54.

underdeveloped nations even if there were no Communist threat.

Mobile Training Teams

Confronted from the outset by a shortage of trained personnel, Laos adopted the Mobile Training Team technique, and in 1957 organized 14 teams of 10 men each. The plan assumed that after the mobile teams had sold the concept of civic action to the rural villagers, the crash program organized by the Commissioner General of Civic Action could then be taken over by the resident military units and General Sananikone's organization could be disbanded. Before that, however, it would have identified the "true holders of local power" in the villages; would have "shown the flag" in the rural areas, thereby refuting the Communist propaganda line that the central government was not interested in the outlying parts of the country; and would have taught the villagers some simple expedients for improving their own lot by elementary self-help projects in sanitation, irrigation, transportation, and agriculture.

As might be surmised, the 14 mobile teams were hardly enough to carry the Lao Government's program throughout approximately 233,000 square kilometers of rugged mountains and thick rain forests. Furthermore, the Kong Le coup of August 1960 and the subsequent reorganization of the government following the 1962 Geneva Agreements diverted attention and resources from civic action. Later, an effort was made to establish a series of volunteer battalion six-man teams in the southern part of the country throughout the 1st and 4th military regions, but this had little opportunity to get underway.

In Thailand, a special interdepartmental organization—the National Se-

curity Organization (NSO)—was established to deal with the "Phase I insurgency" situation which was developing in the northeast provinces adjacent to Laos. The NSO organized Mobile Development Units (MDU's) to carry its civic action programs into these remote areas. MDU-1 became operational at Ban Na Khu in the summer of 1962. MDU-2 began work in Sakon Nakhon Province in March 1963; by May 1963 MDU-3 was deployed to Nakhon Phanom Province.

Current programs envisage an additional 12 to 16 MDU's to carry out civic action projects, not only in the northeastern provinces, but also to the east of Bangkok toward the Cambodian border and in the far south of the Kra Isthmus toward Malaysia. These teams seek to help the villagers meet their most immediate needs—fresh drinking water, personal and community hygiene, and elementary assistance in agriculture.

While the MDU's combine both civil and military talents, the Royal Thai Army provides leadership and logistic support for the entire operation. Four MDU's are now functioning in northeast Thailand, and are having a direct impact on more than 1.5 million villagers.

Four Programs

From South Vietnam, it has been reported that:

The fighting of the guerrilla war in Vietnam requires as much civic action as it does military. . . . Killing Viet Cong will not alone win the war. . . . First we must convince the people who support the VC or who are indifferent . . . and that means civic action must be in the forefront of all activity.

The late President Ngo-dinh-Diem established a Department of Civic Ac-

tion to get the program underway. In his mind, civic action would help bind together his government's four major programs, and would, thereby, gain the active support of the entire population in the war against the Communist insurgents. Despite two changes of government, the mutually supporting programs, which are still being carried out, have always had the full approval and encouragement of the United States:

Strategic Hamlet Program

Utilizing the experience gained in Malaya, the strategic hamlet program is the matrix around which all Vietnamese national effort is built. It seeks to separate the population from the Viet Cong by organizing the people into defended hamlets and villages. Begun in earnest less than two years ago, it now provides a measure of security and direct government support to a growing number of South Vietnam's 15 million people. As the strategic hamlet complexes become more defensible, and as they are able to link up with adjacent liberated areas, the government's authority should expand. At the same time, the Viet Cong's freedom of action and their sources of supplies and recruits will be reduced accordingly.

Military Program

The military program, revised and brought up to date by the new Military Revolutionary Council as its 1964 National Campaign Plan, seeks to maintain constant offensive pressure on the Viet Cong throughout the entire country. It contemplates destroying the Viet Cong "infrastructure," or clandestine cells, in the villages and hamlets, while attacking the guerrilla forces through a series of small unit actions conducted day and night on a decentralized basis by di-

vision or regimental-size units. These actions are to be carried out in such numbers and with such frequency that the Viet Cong will be deprived of any opportunity to assemble in large numbers for an attack; they will be constantly harassed and kept on the run.

Amnesty Program

Called the *Chieu Hoi* program by the Vietnamese, the amnesty program was started on the national level in mid-April 1963 only after the most careful prior planning. It is supported by a nationwide organization of specially trained cadre and by provincial rehabilitation centers which facilitate the distribution of government assistance to innocent peasants who have been forced to assist the Viet Cong, but who return to the protection of the government. By turning themselves in, the former guerrillas need not fear reprisal or mistreatment. They are permitted to return to their own village—if it is under government control—and begin life again as citizens of free Vietnam.

Direct Assistance to Rural Villager

Acting on US advice, a special 50 million-piaster province rehabilitation fund was established in 1963 by the Government of Vietnam to provide direct governmental assistance at the hamlet and village level. These monies are used throughout the country in conjunction with the strategic hamlet program on programs of the civic action type which are designed to win the support of the peasants. They include the establishment of schools and dispensaries at the hamlet level, provision of food and clothing under emergency conditions, and direct agricultural or animal husbandry assistance.

The thread of civic action runs through all four programs and serves

to link them together in support of the government's basic objectives. The United States is urging that they be continued as actively as circumstances permit even though the Viet Cong may succeed in increasing the level of insurgency in Vietnam.

These programs are the means whereby the population will gradually be isolated from the Viet Cong and the cooperation of the rural inhabitants will be secured. Basically, they are designed to provide the villager the three things he longs for most—permanent security, an opportunity to plant and harvest his crop, and a reasonable assurance that his family can grow up in peace.

Army Support •

The Department of the Army, which has long urged a progressive, worldwide expansion of our Government's interagency support for civic action, is the most active agency of the US Government in this field. Approximately 80 percent of the equipment and personnel required to support existing programs are provided by the Army. US Army Civic Action Mobile Training Teams (CAMTT's) have been dispatched to some 16 countries, including Colombia, Guatemala, Ecuador, El Salvador, Indonesia, Iran, Vietnam, and Korea. By the end of 1963 US-supported civic action programs had developed into a progressive interagency effort in 25 countries. During Fiscal Year 1964 plans call for extending these programs to 30 countries.

The over-all magnitude and growth of this effort is reflected in the total

US funds (MAP-AID) made available to support civic action. In Fiscal Year 1962 they amounted to just under 10 million dollars; in Fiscal Year 1963 this figure (exclusive of the money allocated in support of the strategic hamlet program in South Vietnam) was more than doubled.

It is unlikely that the level of effort devoted to civic action will continue to grow exponentially as it has in the few years since 1961. However, there can be little doubt that it will be continued, at least at Fiscal Year 1963 levels. It has established itself as one of the primary weapons for countering insurgency in underdeveloped areas.

If, through the joint efforts of the United States and the host government, responsible long-range economic and rural development programs can be agreed upon and organized in time to follow up and exploit the initial civic action "breaking of the ice" between the peasants and the central government, then the full potential of civic action will be realized. Fortunately, current reports from the field indicate a growing awareness on the part of several friendly governments of the interrelationship between the two.

As this process expands, we can expect to see a much needed and long overdue drawing together of the central government and the rural population in many countries now threatened by Communist pressures. This will be a major step toward gaining victory in any counterinsurgency war.